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This study attempts to determine the best way for public libraries to shelve graphic novels. "Best" is defined by circulation and by patron satisfaction as assessed by a survey. It discusses the existing research on the topic and presents the hypothesis that the best method will be to keep graphic novels in their own designated shelving area. The graphic novels at the Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library have traditionally been interfiled with prose works. For this study, their monthly circulation was measured for three months; they were then moved to a separate section, their circulation measured for two more months, and patrons surveyed on their opinions of the change. Results were difficult to interpret, but patron response seemed positive and the final month saw the highest circulation. The paper concludes with the hope that two more months' data will allow for a conclusive expansion of this research in the future.

Headings:

Graphic novels -- Administration

Graphic novels -- Cataloging

Public libraries -- Cataloging

Shelving of books, periodicals, etc. -- Case studies

Shelving of books, periodicals, etc. -- Evaluation

Surveys -- Shelving of books, periodicals, etc.

GRAPHIC NOVELS AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF SHELVING LOCATION

by
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Introduction

The inclusion of graphic novels in libraries is a relatively new phenomenon. Librarians are discovering a demand for these materials, and are responding with enthusiasm, if not always with great knowledge of the format. Many articles, guides, and books exist for the purpose of helping librarians to choose graphic novels for their collections. There is, however, considerably less literature on how to manage graphic novels once one has decided to add them to the library. Still less literature exists that approaches these issues scientifically, offering empirical rather than anecdotal support for one method or another.

One special issue of graphic novel collections is location. Some librarians shelve graphic novels as if they were regular books: the fiction by author, the nonfiction by topic. Some shelve all graphic novels under the Dewey Decimal category 741.5, part of the section on art. Some catalog and shelve graphic novels using a combination of these systems. Others shelve them separately, in their own section or sometimes in multiple sections, e.g. Young Adult Graphic Novels and the Adult Graphic Novels.

This study theorizes that the latter approach will be the most effective in promoting graphic novels and getting them into the hands of interested patrons. Specifically, the hypothesis of this study is that moving graphic novels that are scattered through the Fiction and/or Nonfiction collections to one Graphic Novel section will raise circulation of and patron satisfaction with the library's graphic novel collection.

Background/Literature Review

Articles on graphic novels in libraries abound. Most of them are brief and fairly informal. Their aims include dispelling misconceptions and concerns about the format, sharing stories of what has worked for individual libraries, and recommending titles to be added to library collections.

Many articles are written for librarians who are unfamiliar with graphic novels, trying to counter ideas of the format as pornographic, worthless junk reading, and/or shoddily-bound. On the content of graphic novels, Hollis Rudiger and Megan Schliesman (2007) point out that, “The term ‘graphic’ in ‘graphic novel’ means highly visual. It does *not* mean mature or violent content.” (57). They go on to state that graphic novels, like other formats, vary in content; depending on the item, they may offer educational, entertainment, or literary value, or a combination of these. Some items may offend some users, but this is true of virtually all material in a library’s collection. Regarding physical quality of the books, Allison Ching says in her 2005 article that her library bought manga (a popular type of graphic novel) in paperback, and found that, “if the spines are reinforced with book tape, the books actually hold up pretty well” (19). She adds, “The basic truth is that, eventually, you will probably have to replace some books, but at that point the original copies will have circulated well enough to justify the cost.” Robyn Young (2007) offers a step-by-step guide to reinforcing the bindings and covers of manga. Other possible concerns about graphic novels are also addressed: Ching says of the right-to-left reading format of manga, a popular type of graphic novel, “Having spent three years in an English classroom with some less-than-strong readers, I

was concerned these books would be too difficult for some students to follow. My fears were completely unfounded” (19).

Both Ching and Young stress the extreme popularity of graphic novels at their libraries. Carol Nylund describes adding graphic novels to her school library and seeing circulation there triple within a year (2007). In the ALA announcement that the Association for Library Service to Children has established a list of titles suggested for a “Children’s Graphic Novel Core Collection,” the board president is quoted as saying, “Graphic novels are wildly popular with kids [and] positively impact children’s visual literacy skill development” (Dan Rude & Linda Mays, 2011, para. 3). The benefits of graphic novels in terms of visual literacy are explored by Françoise Mouly in a 2011 article devoted to that subject. Jesse Karp (2011) notes that, “The graphic novel is no longer just a format suitable to learn *about*. It is also starting to be used as a tool to educate” (34). Nor is it just children who are reading these books: as Ann Kim (2009) points out, “comics-loving adults are positively giddy that this format is getting the recognition it deserves” (20).

The values and uses of graphic novels are relevant to decisions on how to catalog and where to shelve them. Several different cataloging and shelving schemes commonly used in libraries could potentially apply. Materials are shelved by format, or else audiobooks would be interfiled with the fiction and nonfiction collections. They are shelved by intended user, or there would not be separate Children’s, Young Adult, and Adult sections. Nonfiction is usually shelved by topic, and fiction sometimes by genre. Where is it most logical to put graphic novels, and where will their fans look for them?

The literature offers support – though rarely with any kind of empirical basis – for a number of different answers.

Some authors do not endorse one system over another. Zahrah Baird and Tracey Jackson mention that librarians must decide on a shelving scheme for graphic novels, noting possibilities without making claims about which might be optimal (2007). Gail Dickinson's 2007 article, helpfully titled "The Question . . . Where Should I Shelve Graphic Novels?" has a rather ambivalent conclusion: "Catalog by content; shelve in order to create student interest at the highest level. Translation: Your catalog should reflect classification number by content for nonfiction and author for fiction, but a special display will highlight the most popular" (56). The author points out that putting all graphic novels into one section without further organization can result in oddities like "a graphic novel on the Holocaust next to a fiction fantasy" (56). This is a strong point. Tempting though it may be for a library with a small – perhaps new – graphic novel section to shelve the books all together under one scheme, this is an argument for at least separating fiction and nonfiction. (The term "graphic novel" is used frequently to apply to both fiction and nonfiction written in this format).¹

Shelving graphic novels in different sections for the different age groups for which they are intended is also supported by the literature. Steve Raiteri (2006) has written many articles – primarily reviews – on graphic novels; he says that shelving graphic novels together without regard to age, "simply isn't advisable. If a preteen patron seeking *Pokemon* or *Powerpuff Girls* discovers mature material like *Preacher* or *Palomar*

¹ For example, the Young Adult Library Services Association's annual Great Graphic Novels for Teens list includes an entire section of nonfiction (Young Adult Library Services Association).

in the same section, this could lead to problems that are best avoided” (52). He says that, when his library had few children’s and adults’ graphic novels, they were interfiled with the children’s and adults’ collections respectively, but the fictional works were put into their own sections as soon as there were enough titles for this to make sense. (Nonfiction graphic novels were left interfiled.) He also says that the fiction graphic novels in his library are shelved by title, not author, so that series titles with different creators will be found together.

Some librarians are primarily concerned with keeping graphic novels together, and not with where, exactly, they are together. Rudiger and Schliesman (2007) suggest that putting them all under 741.5 might be a good system.

Others disagree. A 2010 article that Martha Cornog coauthored with Raiteri insists on dedicated shelving for adult graphic novels, saying that adult fans of the format will not look for it in the 741s. This article points out that dedicated shelving is given to large-print and DVD collections, and that graphic novels, too, are a format, and patrons will expect to find them in their own section. Elizabeth Haynes (2009) says that, while many preprocessed graphic novels come with a designation of 741.5, this may not be the best location for them. It suggests that a designated shelving area might be a more intuitive place for patrons to look. Kat Kan (2003) agrees, saying that, when shelved under 741.5, “In my experience, the graphic novels get ‘lost’ on the shelves, because most teens won’t browse in nonfiction” (15).

Young’s 2007 article says that her library had shelved graphic novels with nonfiction – some under 741.5 and some by their subjects – but that, at a patron’s

suggestion, they moved the graphic novels to their own section, which “resulted in a dramatic increase of circulation” (28). That library’s graphic novels are labeled GN and, below that, with the author’s name or Dewey designation, thus avoiding Dickinson’s problem of fiction and nonfiction mixing. Perhaps the most dramatic statement on the subject comes, again, from Raiteri, in a 2003 article in which he relates the founding of his library’s YA Graphic Novel (fiction) section. He says a special shelf was designated, and the 55 selected books – some new, some pulled from the shelves and recataloged – were placed on it with a poster promoting the new section. By the end of the day, 50 were gone.

All this suggests taking a glance at the rationale behind library shelving schemes in general. A number of authors have compared and contrasted library shelving schemes with those used in bookstores. Sarah Hopkins (2007) describes the reorganization of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in the 1980s, when the library decided to adopt a more bookshop-style model. New sections integrated fiction and nonfiction: Mystery/True crime, Western/History of the American West, and more. Circulation increased by 30 percent in the first year (10). On the other side of this issue stands Shonda Brisco, who in her 2004 article argues that libraries are more logically and more intuitively organized than bookstores – that the real lessons they have to learn from their for-profit counterparts are lessons of atmosphere and customer service. It does not seem necessary to dwell long on this aspect of the literature – suffice to say librarians would like their shelving systems to make materials easy to find. Worth noting, though, is the fact that bookstores do generally shelf graphic novels apart from other fiction and nonfiction. For libraries to

do the same might, as the authors cited earlier suggest, make it easier for patrons to find the graphic novels.

Changing tack slightly, what does the literature say that might help us measure the outcome variables of this study? Circulation is easily quantified. Its implications are sometimes debated – Francine Fialkoff’s 2002 article is critical of it as a measurement of service quality – but most librarians would probably agree that it is a useful measure in determining the popularity of a collection. It is cited extremely frequently in articles in the field of library science (recent examples include Barbara Hoffert, 2011 and Ray Lyons & Keith Lance, 2010).

Patron satisfaction, however, is a bit more complicated. The use of surveys for measuring this variable is supported by Anne Martensen and Lars Grønholdt, who, in their 2003 paper, discuss the use of such surveys and provide sample questions used in their study. They also helpfully discuss potential uses of the information obtained by this method. Lynnette Miller (2004) details the creation of user satisfaction surveys for libraries.

Methodology

This study was held at the Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library (FPECL). Located in Farmville, Virginia, this is one of the two branches of the Central Virginia public library system. Serving a population of 36,100 people, FPECL holds 50,604 volumes and has a circulation rate of 61,451 checkouts per year (Marshall Breeding, 2011). As of the start of the study, the library was shelving some of its graphic novels under 741.5 (or J 741.5, or YA 741.5) and some in the Fiction (or Juvenile Fiction

or Young Adult Fiction) section by author. After an explanation of this study's aim and its planned methods, the director and branch manager of FPECL gave permission for the collection and facilities to be used in the following way.

The first step was to identify which books would be considered graphic novels for the purposes of this study. Secondly, circulation data would be gathered on these books for several consecutive months. Thirdly, the books would be moved to a separate Graphic Novel section. Finally, the effects of this move would be measured by the collection of more monthly circulation data and the results of a patron satisfaction survey.

The books selected as graphic novels were those that featured images used in a sequence that are necessary to the story and appear on most or all pages. The selected books were those that featured images used in a sequence that are necessary to the story and appear on most or all pages. This excluded books with photographs or illustrations that enhance, but are not necessary to understand, the narrative. It included comic books (e.g. *Calvin and Hobbes*), manga (e.g. *Hellsing*), non-manga graphic novels (e.g. *American Born Chinese*, *Laika*), and any other categories that fit these parameters.

For each of these books, the title, barcode number, and the call number were recorded. The barcode number was to facilitate checking the books' circulation; the call number was to locate them easily for the purposes of the second part of the experiment.

Also noted were the graphic novels that were checked out at that time. Any books that remained checked out to the same patron over the course of the five-month data recording period – in other words, any books that were not available to be checked out

during that time, and were likely permanently lost – would have their data excluded from the study. (This turned out to be the case with only one book.)

Then, the total instances of circulation of each book were recorded. After one month, this data was recorded again, and note was taken of which books still had not been returned by the patrons who had them as of the first session. A few recently-ordered graphic novels were added to the collection during this time; their baseline circulation statistics were included, noting that they had no data for the first month. This process was repeated two more times, yielding a total of three months' circulation data on the graphic novels of the Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library.

At the end of the fourth session, all of the graphic novels were pulled from the shelves. The spine of each book was marked with bright green tape, and the same tape was used to mark out the new graphic novel section, located just inside the library's teen area. The books were also put given a "Graphic Novel" special status in the library's computers. An explanation was to the staff, who had been aware of the project since its start, of the changes that were made. Staff were given a list of the checked-out titles would need to be marked with green tape when they came back in and thanked them for their help. They did an excellent job catching returned graphic novels and taping them.

With the establishment of the new section, a tri-fold posterboard display was placed on the empty top shelf above it. The purpose of this display was fourfold: to label the shelves as a graphic novel section, to answer some frequently asked questions about graphic novels (e.g. clarifying the use of the term "graphic"), to request that patrons take the survey intended to measure their satisfaction with the new shelving arrangement, and

to provide patrons with the information required by the Institutional Review Board as a condition of the distribution of the survey. (The display was also intended to alert people to the new section; to this end, too, a statement was posted on the library's Facebook page that read, "The library has a new Graphic Novel section! It's located in the teen area – check it out!") Beside the shelves stood an opaque box, labeled as the place to turn in completed surveys. It was taped securely closed, with a slit in the top to receive the surveys.

The patron satisfaction survey comprised eight questions. Five of these asked the patrons to circle "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" in accordance with their feelings about a statement such as, "Having the graphic novels mixed in with regular fiction and nonfiction the way they were before made it more likely that I would find books I want," and, "Having the graphic novels in a separate section the way they are now makes it more likely that I will find books I want." The other three questions asked patrons whether they had read or checked out graphic novels from the Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library before their move to the new section, whether they had done so since the move, and whether they planned to do so in the future. The survey was anonymous, and consent information was available alongside it, per the requirements of the Institutional Review Board of the University of North Carolina.

After another month, circulation data was recorded again. At this point, circulation data was lower than expected. Lack of patron awareness of the new graphic novel section was considered as a possible explanation. In order to see the section, patrons have to go to, or at least go near, the teen area, which is off to one side of the

library and not close to many of the resources patrons popularly use (e.g. computers). In an attempt to counter this lack of awareness, if that was indeed the problem, a sign was written on a whiteboard at the front of the library, which read, “Have you seen the new GRAPHIC NOVEL section? It’s in the teen area!”

One month later, the final set of circulation data was recorded. Circulation statistics were gathered for a total of five months: three of which the graphic novels spent interfiled with other books, and two of which they spent located in their own separate section. The number of checkouts of graphic novels for each month was determined, as was the average circulation per graphic novel of each month. (This latter statistic takes into account the varying numbers of graphic novels during the different months that resulted from additions being made to the collection.)

The surveys placed in the box were also collected at this time. Because so few surveys were returned, statistical tests would not have produced significant results, but the responses were examined to get an idea of general attitudes.

Results

Circulation data was recorded for a total of 106 graphic novels. Data for one of these books was excluded because it was checked out to the same patron throughout the study (becoming more overdue as the months passed), so it could not show any effect of the changes made to the shelving situation. Some new graphic novels were added to the collection over the course of the study. They are not reflected in the statistics for the months in which they were acquired, as their baseline data was not recorded until the recording period at the end of that month; their circulation data is thus included in the

statistics starting the month after their addition to the collection. The data is presented in Table 1 and expanded on below.

Table 1

Month	Graphic Novels Counted	Total Circulation of GNs	Average Per-Item Circulation of GNs
1	81	14	0.173
2	82	17	0.207
3	100	18	0.180
4	105	8	0.076
5	105	19	0.181

For the first month, spanning mid-May to mid-June, the library had a total of 81 graphic novels (excluding the one book that would eventually have to be removed from the data due to being out of the library for the entire study). There were 14 total checkouts of books on the list, making an average of 0.173 checkouts per graphic novel.

One more graphic novel was added during this first month, so its data was included in the statistics for the second month, ending in mid-July. During this second month, items on the list of 82 graphic novels circulated a total of 17 times, making an average of 0.207 checkouts per item.

Eighteen graphic novels were added to the collection during the second month, so statistics for the third month (ending in mid-August) includes data on 100 graphic novels.

These circulated a total of 18 times for an average of 0.180 checkouts per item. Three graphic novels had their first checkouts during this month. After data was collected, the graphic novels were relocated to their new, separate section in the library's teen area.

Five more graphic novels were added during the third month, so the fourth month (ending in mid-September) includes data on a total of 105 items. These circulated a total of 8 times for an average of 0.076 checkouts per graphic novel. Three graphic novels checked out for the first time during this month. As of the time of data collection, three others had reserves placed on them; no reserves had been placed on any graphic novel when data was collected for any of the previous three months. After data was collected, a sign was posted at the front of the library to inform patrons that there was a newly-established graphic novel section located in the teen area.

During the final month, ending in mid-October, these 105 graphic novels circulated a total of 19 times for an average of 0.181 checkouts per item. Five graphic novels circulated for the first time during this month. As of the time of data collection, one item had a reserve placed on it. Also during this month, an associate who regularly visits the library reported that on four occasions she had found a total of 14 graphic novels misshelved, most in the Juvenile section. She had recorded the titles of 9 of them; of these, 4 did not actually check out during this month. The shelves of the graphic novel section were also found to be in disorder, with many volumes misshelved, at the time of data recording for this final month.

The surveys were collected in mid-October. Only five had been completed, which is far too few for significant statistical analysis. It seems worth noting, however, that

each of the five chose either “agree” or “strongly agree” in response to the statements, “Before they were put into a separate section, I did not know the library had this many graphic novels,” “Having the graphic novels in a separate section the way they are now makes it more likely that I will find books I want,” and, “I prefer having the graphic novels in a separate section the way they are now.” Responses to the statement, “I prefer having the graphic novels mixed in with regular fiction and nonfiction the way they were before,” ranged from “neutral” through “disagree” to “strongly disagree.” (Responses to the other questions ranged all the way across the scale.) The only comment written by a participant was, “Thank you”.

Discussion

The dip in circulation immediately following the separation of the graphic novels does not match this study’s hypothesis. After gathering the fourth month’s data and seeing this drop, four possible explanations for this development were considered.

Explanation 1

Patrons do not like graphic novels. This seems unlikely, given the fact that the library had received requests from patrons to collect more graphic novels. It is possible, however, that many patrons dislike or are uninterested in graphic novels, and that they would therefore avoid a section composed entirely of books in this format.

Explanation 2

The removal of Juvenile graphic novels from the children's area has lowered their circulation rates by lowering the chance of browsers finding them in the area in which they'd expect. The data supports this possibility (see Table 2, compare Table 1).

Table 2

Month	Juvenile Graphic Novels Counted	Total Circulations of J GNs	Average Per-Item Circulation of J GNs
1	48	14	0.292
2	49	12	0.245
3	58	12	0.207
4	60	5	0.083
5	60	4	0.067

Over half (60 out of 105) of the graphic novels analyzed during the fourth month came from the Juvenile section; while their average per-item circulation is higher than that month's overall average, it is still far lower than the average per-item circulation of Juvenile graphic novels during the first three months. Possibly people who find the new section, which is in the teen area, are mostly patrons who are interested in teen-level books, and therefore do not check out Juvenile graphic novels, while the people interested in Juvenile books do not go to the teen section.

The adult graphic novels experienced low circulation over the fourth month, too, but it was less dramatic because they were a small sample and had circulated poorly before (see Table 3).

Table 3

Month	Adult Graphic Novels Counted	Total Circulation of Adult GNs	Average Per-Item Circulation of Adult GNs
1	9	0	0
2	9	0	0
3	13	1	0.077
4	13	0	0
5	13	4	0.308

The teen graphic novels had the highest average per-item circulation for this month (see Table 4). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the new section was located in the teen area. Patrons who discovered the new section were likely to be already in the teen area, and thus, perhaps, likely to already have an interest in teen materials.

Table 4

Month	Teen Graphic Novels Counted	Total Circulations of Teen GNs	Average Per-Item Circulation of Teen GNs
1	24	0	0
2	24	5	0.208

3	30	5	0.167
4	32	3	0.094
5	32	11	0.344

Explanation 3

The drop in circulation is due completely or in part to another factor. For example, the first three months of data, before the separation of the graphic novels, were collected during the summer (mid-May to mid-August), while the fourth month encompassed the start of the area's schools. This could especially have affected the circulation of Juvenile graphic novels: perhaps patrons who might otherwise check them out at the Farmville library are instead obtaining them through a school library, or perhaps library-based summer activities had brought in child patrons who then checked out Juvenile graphic novels.

Explanation 4

Patrons are not yet aware of the new section. The only sign advertising it is located directly over the section itself, and is thus unlikely to be seen by anyone who is not already in or near the teen area. A brief announcement was made to the library's Facebook page when the section was established, but response was minimal.

In an attempt to rule out the first of these possibilities and counter the last one, a notice was written on a whiteboard in the library's front lobby area, "Have you seen the

new GRAPHIC NOVEL section? It's in the teen area!" Following this, circulation in the graphic novel section more than doubled from the fourth month to the fifth, with the number of total checkouts rising slightly above those of the months before the separation. The reported misshelving of at least 14 graphic novels during this last month, including several items that were not actually checked out, indicates that in-library use was also considerable.

It is possible that the sign was not responsible – or not solely responsible – for this increase in circulation. Patrons may have spread awareness of the section through word of mouth after its initial appearance, or other factors may have been at work. Still, the sign might be considered a confounding factor in the study – promotion of the new section – but there is a case to be made that all it did was to alert patrons to the section's existence. This does not constitute an extra boost for the graphic novel section; rather, it makes patrons aware of where to find graphic novels, just as they are already aware of where to find fiction, nonfiction, audiobooks, etc.

Worth noting is the fact that, despite the general rise in circulation, the checkouts of Juvenile graphic novels actually dropped further during the last month. (In keeping with this, none of the reserves found on graphic novels during data collection for the fourth and fifth months was on a Juvenile item.) This may reflect the effects of possibilities 2 or 3 listed above, or a combination of these. Perhaps the term "graphic novel" does not suggest to patrons that the section will contain books for children; its location in the teen area might confirm this idea. On the other hand, of the books found misshelved outside the section, nearly all (11 out of 14) were found in the Juvenile section, most or all of them books with Juvenile call numbers. This would seem to

indicate that patrons with an interest in Juvenile graphic novels were at least interacting with the section. It is possible that patrons read or looked at the books before leaving the library, then left them on tables, where shelvers found them and, not noticing or not understanding the green tape on the spines, shelved them according to their call numbers. This seems especially likely given that graphic novels – and most especially graphic novels for children – tend to take less time to read than prose books, and one might be finished during a visit to the library without the need to check it out.

The survey results are interesting, if statistically unhelpful. The uniformly positive response to the new section certainly suggests that patrons have found it useful. Also, it seems meaningful that all survey respondents agree that, before the new section, they had been unaware that the library had so many graphic novels. All but five of the books had been in the collection for a month or more prior to the establishment of the new section.

Conclusion

For practical purposes, there are two main issues here. One is the question raised by the study's original hypothesis: "What is the best shelving scheme for graphic novels in a public library?" (Or, within the bounds of this study, "Is it better to shelve graphic novels in a public library together in a distinct section or to interfile them with other books?") The other, raised by the results of the study, is, "Is this answer different for children's graphic novels than for teen and adult ones?"

It may be that the ideal system is a slight compromise of the original theory. If readers of Juvenile graphic novels are going to look for them in the children's area of the

library, perhaps there should be a Juvenile Graphic Novel section in that area. The teen and adult graphic novels, which seem to circulate well in the new section (at least as of the second month they were there), could stay there.

Of course, the real problem here is that only two months of data could be gathered after the establishment of the graphic novel section. It is impossible to know from this whether the drop and subsequent rise of circulation in the new section is due to any of the four reasons cited in the Discussion section of this paper, or to something else entirely. The director of FPECL library has, however, given permission to continue collecting data through December, which will yield an additional two months' statistics. With these, an extended study could determine more conclusively whether a separate graphic novel section truly is the best way for a public library to shelve graphic novels. These findings will be of use to the Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library and to the field of library science.

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